

International Centre for Local and Regional Development

Executive Training Programme

CroSPlaN II - An INTERREG IVA Funded Programme

Module Four
Service Delivery:
New Models of Delivery and Community Empowerment

Post Module Report



7th November 2013

Glencarn Hotel, Castleblayney



International Centre for Local and
Regional Development

BACKGROUND TO MODULE 4

Recognising that natural hinterlands – or “functional territories” – do not adhere to man-made boundaries and thus neither do the functions of local government, there is a growing awareness among the councils in the Irish border region that enhanced collaboration and joint work on common priorities must move up their agendas. Public sector collaboration in the Irish border region can be significantly enhanced through strengthened leadership skills, access to innovative practices and opportunities to build knowledge networks among colleagues. The ICLRD’s experience is that high-level training and animation can help both senior officials and elected representatives in local authorities to have a better understanding of how their development opportunities are linked and fit into a larger strategic context.

The Executive Training and Animation Programme for cross-border region councils, using the successful ICLRD model linking training and animation developed under CroSPlaN I, targets the 22 Councils involved in the three local authority-led cross-border networks, namely:

- Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN);
- North West Region Cross Border Group; and
- East Border Region Ltd.

The programme will be delivered through a programme of plenary sessions, seminars, discussion forums and working groups.

As demonstrated in CroSPlaN I, this programme will improve the quality of cross-border cooperation and provide a critical forum to bring together cross-border councils, selected cross-border bodies and central government departments to support joint solutions supported by collaborative agreements.

The programme will consist of 10 modules; with post module reports to be prepared for the initial five plenary sessions.

Please see the training website for information on upcoming modules and readings
<http://iclr.org/training-crosplan/>

INTRODUCTION

This module considers one of the core functions of local government on the island of Ireland - that of being a service deliverer. It examines the new models of service delivery being proposed under the reform agendas, North and South; with specific attention being paid to the concept of 'Community Planning' in Northern Ireland and Social and Economic Committees (SECs) - now called Local Community Development Committees - in Ireland.

The module debates the challenges and opportunities presented by these new models for integrated governance in service delivery. It questions whether these new models will facilitate broader engagement in the process of service delivery - including widening the spectrum of communities with whom local government engages. And in the context of community sector, what type of civic leadership is required to best engage with these new models of service delivery?

SESSION 1: NEW MODELS OF SERVICE DELIVERY ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND

Local Government: Delivering Effective Services to Create Vibrant and Sustainable Communities

Ms. Jenny Pyper, Deputy Secretary, Department for Social Development

Given the diverse audience participating in this programme, Ms. Pyper commenced her presentation by noting that the Department for Social Development in Northern Ireland has a big delivery arm - focusing on social security, housing policy, child maintenance, and urban regeneration and community development. In terms of regeneration, this alone has an budget of £78million. A key aspect of this work programme is on creating urban centres, of promoting viable town and city centres (areas like Colin) and in developing and empowering communities. In such programmes, the third-sector has a key role to play.

The Department has recently published its URDC - a policy framework which will guide decision-making and sets out the future direction of the regeneration programme. The framework, according to Ms. Pyper is needed to consolidate work in this area - there are a lot of different policy tool and monies being deployed by a range of bodies. This needs to be better coordinated; without this, there is no clear sense of how we should deal with the 'big issues'.

The Framework is emerging at the same time as RPA which, from a DSD perspective will give local government a statutory responsibility in the area of regeneration - which in turn is closely linked to spatial planning and community planning. While it is up to the Councils themselves how they take forward these new responsibilities (powers), the Framework advocates a preferred way forward. It is, in effect, a major review of what has happened over the past 10-12 years and identifies priorities for the medium-term. It recognises that there is 'no one size fits all' approach to regeneration, that places and communities have different requirements. What it does, however, is present a flexible yet clear methodology of how local issues can be brought to the fore and addressed.

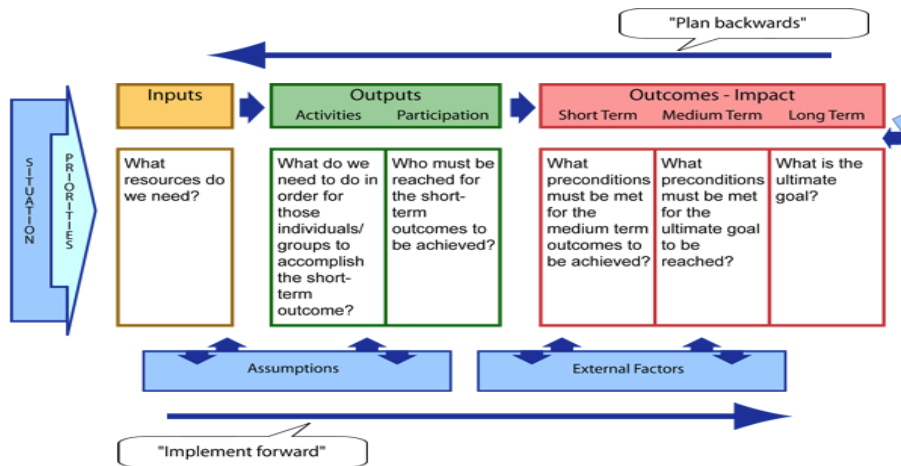
The key objectives of the Framework are:

1. Tackle area-based deprivation;
2. Strengthen the competitiveness of towns and cities;
3. Improve linkages between areas of need and areas of opportunity; and
4. Develop more cohesive and engaged communities.

For example, investment in Enniskillen to coincide with the G8 Summit heightened local confidence - even though much of the works undertaken were largely superficial.

Evidence-based policy is key to successful regeneration - as is an innovative financial environment. The knowledge and skills of practitioners on the ground must be tapped into - hence the value and role of the third-sector for example.

An Outcomes-focused Approach - The Logic Model



The emphasis must increasingly be placed on the outcomes; using a logic model, the Department places great importance on consensus. This model almost requires you to think backwards - to take time to reflect on what you really want to achieve and based on this, decide then what you need to do. This model, it is argued, leads to joined-up thinking, it opens up dialogue and allows a long-term approach to be adopted.

There are challenges ahead for DSD and local government; there are issues that still need to be agreed upon in terms of transfer of staff, transfer of monies/budget, etc. In the context of RPA, it is hard for either unit of government to plan ahead in this information vacuum.

Community planning, tailored to each area, is a process that will take years to bed down and deliver on outcomes - but it is worth the investment. A big challenge at present in terms of

regeneration is the management of expectations locally versus the viewpoints and ongoing priorities of DSD.

Community Planning in Northern Ireland

Dr. Gavan Rafferty, School of the Built Environment, University of Ulster

Dr. Rafferty notes that the ongoing reform of local government represents a modernisation of local government in Northern Ireland - as well as being a period of significant transformation. For all those involved - whether in central/local government or as statutory partners to the process - everyone is going on a journey.

Community planning as being implemented in Northern Ireland is about understanding need, building a framework around that need, empowering stakeholders through capacity building and pursuing service alignment through resulting policies and actions.

A significant challenge for community planning at the outset has been the lack of a clear definition of what is meant by 'community'. We have communities of geography, communities of practitioners, etc. The term implies having something in common - of the need to work together around common interests. It also implies the need to work across boundaries - which again are varied in nature.

The process of community planning as such can be taken to involve identification, analysis and collaboration. Community planning involves many different types of relationships at play - with leadership coming from many different sources: political leaders, community leaders, managerial leaders, etc. This is positive - for community planning to work, there is a need for leaders from these various realms to be actively involved.

Across the island of Ireland, each jurisdiction are exploring their own approach to community planning. Across councils - even intra-jurisdictionally - there is no one single model emerging.

The emphasis of community planning is on effective service delivery - with communities effectively involved in decision-making. It requires a commitment from a wide variety of agencies to work together - with the process being led and facilitated by local councils. As such, councils are increasingly having to (re)engage with community engagement principles and methods.

Community planning requires all public service organisations to cooperate on developing and implementing the agreed plan - both in terms of interagency working but also in terms of monitoring.

While this system creates many opportunities, there are a range of challenges which come with this:

- The need to strengthen relationships - the challenge of listening, nurturing trust, reconciling different styles of leadership, etc.

- Improving policy - integration of policy, achieving policy alignment, etc.
- Streamlining governance - bringing about culture change, establishing new professional and cultural norms and values, etc.
- Increasing collective capacity - shift towards "we" (rather than "me"), building up staff capacity, etc.
- Potential for innovation - boundary spanning, need for win-wins, etc.
- Better address community needs - evidence-informed policy, data-sharing, how we collaborate, etc.

Community planning in effect represents a shift from opinion seeking to empowerment! It is about community engagement and working together - with an emphasis on outcomes. There are a growing number of resources becoming available in Northern Ireland to support this process - all of which are geared towards supporting an active partnership in the design and implementation of the resulting community plan.

Community planning is being undertaken in a complex environment requiring an understanding of the economic, social and environmental aspects of 'community' and involving a range of stakeholders. The onus is now on local government to rethink what is meant by good community engagement - and to be more innovative in terms of how they communicate and engagement with their communities.

Municipal Districts & Local Community Development Committees (formerly Social and Economic Committees)

Dr. Seán O'Riordáin, Seán O'Riordáin & Associates

Local government in the Republic of Ireland is one of the most centralised systems in Europe - or at least that is the perception!. The Irish system of local government is actually quite unique within the OECD - it is a disaggregate system where nobody knows who is in charge of anything!

Local government is increasingly expected to be an innovator in public management - and indeed, there are a number of councils who are doing excellent things when benchmarked against others...while others are being the least innovative they can be.

A core challenge for the sector is that it has been ignored for a long time - there are limited levels of trust between central and local government. There is no voice for local government at central government level - and this absence of a 'hearing' as part of the reform agenda has been very striking. If we look at the national partnerships, a lot of what was proposed was delivered through the local government structures - yet, as a body, local government had no seat at the table.

There is also within local government a long history of an unequal relationship between the Manager and elected officials (relative to other OECD countries). There has been little or no redress of long-standing issues such as boundaries, towns having no municipal status, limited

revenue role, duplication of function (between county/town councils) and the limited role played in many community / local activities. The system as it stands is no longer fit for purpose.

Quick Overview of the past and present...

- A History of ignoring local urban government
- Limited levels of trust
- Unequal manager-councillor relationship
- No voice at national level
- No addressing of long-standing issues such as boundaries, towns without municipal status, multiplicity of policies and plans
- Unfairness of county/urban councillor roles
- Limited revenue role
- Duplication
- Limited role in local, community and rural development and economic development generally

Putting People First provides a clear political vision of the role and objectives of local government - and indeed, regional government also. It outlines the criteria for transfer of functions and responsibilities over the next two decades - involving a new municipal model and a new regional model.

Standards are being introduced in line with OECD members (covering quality of / range of services entitles to) - with a reorientation being to the municipal level of local government.

The *Local Government Bill 2013* should be signed into law by Christmas - and if it goes ahead as laid out, it will fundamentally alter the state of local government. It will see a reduction in the number of elected representatives (which leaves a major gap for community voices to fill) - which is an interesting development as Ireland already has the lowest level of elected representatives per head of population in the OECD.

Town councils as currently structures will be abolished - but this is appropriate as they are inadequate for 21st century functionality. There will, in there place, be a move towards municipal structures that one would find elsewhere in Europe esp. in the Nordic countries. Associated with this shift is the greater empowerment of those remaining elected representatives - councillors will have a policy-leading role...but this requires supports in terms of capacity building, pay, etc. Local government is to become more citizen oriented with greater

emphasis being placed on the municipal - the success of this, however is dependent on other bodies buying into this model.

The new legislation also provides for a direct relationship between spatial planning and local plans with the concept of community planning. Economic development is seen as key and will now have its own dedicated Committee within local government. The Community planning function will be delivered through the newly constituted Local Community and Development Committees (LCDCs)...or CDB nua? albeit, on this occasion the structure is empowered to resource programmes put forward. Also in support of community planning, an Inter-Departmental Committee will be established - chaired by DoECLG - to ensure that messages coming out of the LCDCs are heard at national level - and become a priority for funding. Community planning in Ireland will have a social policy / rural development priority - and will be integrated with existing core strategies.

Local government is also increasingly being encouraged to engage and lead on the shared services agenda; they are in a unique position to bid to be lead - with such positions bringing access to Exchequer funding.

Regional government is charged with developing Regional Spatial and Economic Plans - these will be adopted by national government.

If all these changes as proposed are implemented, this period of reform provides an unrivalled opportunity for local government to have a central role in the delivery of services and the development of policy. The reform programme represents a radical change for elected officials in terms of standards, responsibilities and decision-making. It is an exciting time for local government.

Q&A with Ms. Pyper, Dr. Rafferty & Dr. O'Riordain

In addition to personal statements and reflections, participants also posed a number of questions. These are paraphrased below along with the speakers' responses in *italics*

All contributors were asked to comment on the status of community planning - in the case of Northern Ireland, it is statutory function for councils but only a requirement for state bodies to react to it. This has implications immediately for how serious the concept is going to be viewed. There are also issues around the constitutes proper citizen engagement - and indeed, the needs of communities and what actually falls under the remit of local government to redress.

Putting People First was also criticised for its lack of consultation with elected officials. There is a sense that the document represents a further loss of power - esp. through the abolition of town councils. The question was asked as to what functions will remain with local government?

Dr. Rafferty noted that there are changing dynamics between the state, councils and community. In terms of engagement of other agencies /bodies with community planning, the general power of competence being given to local government in Northern Ireland can be used to force stakeholders to engage with the process- albeit this is not an ideal scenario. Within communities, the aspects of 'need' versus 'want' will have to be discussed - and it is recognised that this is a difficult conversation to initiate. Evidence - through data analysis - will be important in this regard.

Dr. O'Riordain noted the importance of statutory power of enforcement - without this, state agencies won't effectively engage. It is recognised across all levels of government that there are outstanding issues that require further consideration - and it is expected that this will happen in consultation with the relevant parties.

SESSION 2: TAKING THE INITIATIVE - DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Learning from Community Planning Pilots

Sharon McNicholl, Strategic Planning and Policy Manager, Belfast City Council and Member of Community Planning & Pilots Working Group

Noting that there are many definitions of community planning, the statutory model being adopted in Northern Ireland is outcomes focused and involves working in conjunction with other public sector providers. The *Local Government Bill* places a duty on councils to deliver on community planning. The challenge in delivering on this is getting people together to work in an integrated way; to this end there is scope for shared target setting - thus allowing other providers to consider what is in this process for them (and this is a leverage point).

Governance in Northern Ireland has, to date, being quite disparate in nature. Community planning has a role in re-integrating the workings of council and other public sector providers - there is a growing role for local government to be a place-shaper; to ensure that investment happens in the right places and in a sustainable manner.

Regional preparations are under way for community planning - a working group is in place, for example, to support local councils and their partners in preparing for this new junction in advance of April 2015.

The Community Planning Foundation Programme has been circulated to all councils in Northern Ireland and is also available on the DoE website. Its aim is to develop consistent understanding of, and lay the foundations for, effective community planning. It plays a key role in the building of relationships and improving the capacity of relevant stakeholders within the council area to effectively engage in this process.

Aligning community planning with spatial and land-use planning and regeneration will take time and commitment. These plans must reinforce each other - with local plans becoming the physical manifestation of community planning.

Community planning requires alignment of regional policy - linked to a broader set of objectives. As a process, it is informed by a series of principles which in turn, should inform the way councils and other stakeholders do things.

The Foundation Programme includes a number of case studies - demonstrating the wide diversity of mechanisms open to Councils in rolling out community planning and engaging with their communities (e.g. Derry's 'One Plan').

Initially, the key to the success of community planning will be working with the willing - and beginning the process on an issue that people can relate to. Community planning is work in progress - it is estimated that it will take 10 years to see the benefits and impacts of this process.

The Community Planning Toolkit

Ms. Louise McNeill, Planner, Community Places

The development of the toolkit has been supported by Big Lottery; with the three pilot areas each exploring the concept from a slightly different perspective / angle:

- Belfast City: Health & well-being
- Omagh/Fermanagh: community engagement (led by RDC rather than the Councils)
- Derry/Strabane: community plans.

Launched in March 2012, Community Places has been working with community development networks to promote the toolkit which is open to a range of stakeholders. There is a website in support of the usage of the toolkit which also includes useful resources around the duties, legislation and managing expectations of partners as part of the community planning process. There are also examples of good practice from the UK and Ireland - with a distinctive emphasis being placed on community engagement practices.

Community engagement is a core theme of the work of Community Places. As a theme of community planning, the toolkit sets out questions and issues that need to be addressed / considered when devising community engagement events. These include who are the key stakeholders? how identify barriers to engagement? and how can these be designed 'out' of the process? what resources are available?

The Scottish Community Development Centre argues there are ten standards behind successful community planning - and that there are resources for each; their toolkit being called VOICE. As part of this toolkit, various methods that could be used to community planning processes are outlined -recognising there is no one single method....rather the method needs to be tailored to local needs (and will inevitably involve a number of different methods).

There is an evolving governance context North and South which requires a new way of thinking by all stakeholders. There is a need for greater innovation in terms of how we achieve collaborative change - and thus achieve better outcomes. In terms of community planning being

an outcomes-based approach, there must be a clear focus on what is to be achieved through the process - what difference can the plan make (rather than just having a plan in place). It is essential that indicators are put in place at the outset to measure performance.

Achieving alignment is most difficult at the strategic level; for example, aligning the planning cycles of different stakeholders. It is not unusual, therefore, to have tensions within partnership working; this can be healthy and lead to constructive debate which in turn can aid the process of community planning.

A burning question for community planning across Northern Ireland is whether the resulting plans will have common status across all 11 councils or will it vary from council to council?

From the pilots being undertaken at present, some key learnings emerging include:

- it is key to bring communities, elected representatives and service providers together as part of the process;
- engagement is critical;
- community planning is about negotiation and agreement to reach and agree priorities (matching 'wants' with 'needs');
- it is essential that programmes and strategies are aligned; with an emphasis on the achievement of longer-term goals.

It is increasingly clear that the definition of 'community planning' needs further work - especially around its focus on services v. well-being. The legislation speaks of performance improvement - but it contains nothing as to how this will be achieved/measured.

Q&A with Ms. McNicholl & Ms. McNeill

Participants largely commented on the process of community planning and the positives it brings to the wider governance system. Funding was identified as a key issue in not only engagement in the process but also the subsequent delivery of the resulting priorities.

In responding to issues of funding and cost to communities, both Ms. McNicholl and Ms. McNeill indicated that this issue needs to be turned on its head - Communities need to think about the type and quality of service they want...and they need to do this with their elected representatives. It is recognised that nothing can happen without resources. It was noted that in England and Wales, community planning processes are facing funding cuts; a scenario that is forcing communities to find efficiencies...which has included forging partnerships.

SESSION 3: LOCAL GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES - CAPTURING THOSE INITIAL IDEAS

Having agreed the sectoral themes as part of Module 3, delegates broke into their respective working groups to concentrate on the identification of a priority theme which will inform the focus / direction of Modules 6-9.

In this regard, some key questions considered by the working groups as part of this session included:

- ✓ Are we all involved in this Working Group for the same reasons? Do we have similar - or at least complimentary - interests in this topic?
- ✓ Can we agree on a single priority theme for this Working Group?
- ✓ By the end of Module 9, what is it we would like to have achieved as a Working Group? What do we need to do to get us to this point?

MODULE CLOSE

Ms. Creamer closed the module by thanking the attendees for their participation and looked forward in anticipation to their active participation in Module 5 on 5th November 2013.

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